Richard Chenoweth interviewed by Zachary Schrag

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Zachary Schrag

We are recording. It is Saturday, August 21, 2021, and Zachary Schrag is interviewing Chenoweth I'm in Arlington, Virginia, and where are you, may I ask?

Richard Chenoweth

I teach at Mississippi State College of Architecture, Art, & Design, in both the School of Architecture and in the Building Construction Science Program.

I'm in Starkville, Mississippi.

Zachary Schrag

And we are doing this by Zoom video conference.

I sent you some basic topics earlier .The first one I'd like to hear a bit about your professional background. Just where you went to architecture school, what projects you've worked on, maybe before the canopy design.

Richard Chenoweth

I studied architecture at the University of Virginia. The early part of my career was mostly residential scale work. I worked for a small firm in Washington. We did high end residential projects in and around DC and northern Virginia and sometimes down in central Virginia. I enjoyed that very much.

I started doing my own projects at some point in the mid 1990s and had some success with that. I designed a church steeple for a project on the eastern shore of Maryland which won a Washington Chapter AIA award, in 1997.

I had a small practice by the late 90s, I was working for myself, doing smaller types of projects.

I've always been very interested in tectonics, and craftsmanship, and sculptural qualities of things, with a very high degree of quality and quality assurance. I was always looking for special projects. I also had a parallel career as a watercolorist around Washington. I feel like I knew every architect in town at that time. I was constantly being called for watercolors.

I also was very interested in computers and was teaching myself animation programs and 3D modeling programs. In the late 90s 3D modeling was not really a thing. I was teaching myself Photoshop and all these technical things to go along with my love of the hands-on craftsmanship type of architecture, and building.

When I was in grad school I built fine furniture.

Zachary Schrag

The one follow up question there is when you when you say it was a steeple was that in addition to an existing building?.

Richard Chenoweth

Yes, it was.

It was it was an old timber-frame church on the eastern shore in Oxford, Maryland. The steeple had been blasted off by a bolt of lightning in the early 60s and the stump had just been covered up with some roofing material. A builder called me—this was my first experience with design-build. We'd worked on a couple things together. He said, hey Rich, would you like to design a steeple? We want to rebuild this Victorian church steeple and we'd like you to do it. There was, I think, one existing photograph of what the steeple looked like. It was a really wonderful experience in that I got to work with the builder.

The builder was a very fine craftsman. He had a former career building boats out on the eastern shore and in North Carolina—a very distinguished restorer of historic ships—so this was not just a dashed off church steeple. It was timber framed in white oak, and it was built in a

soybean field. It was built very precisely and then trucked to the site, and the little stump was removed and the steeple put on.

Zachary Schrag

I hope I'm not reading too much into this, but that seems like a pretty strong precedent for the canopy, where you have an existing structure that people love and then you have to add on to it. Am I off base there?

Richard Chenoweth

No, you're not off base.

I hadn't made that direct connection between the steeple and the canopies, but yeah, we built something really beautiful offsite, and then one day we came over with a crane and popped it onto the church. The client has been very happy with it ever since. That was a really neat project.

Zachary Schrag

One of the things I'm struggling with here is the line between historic preservation and creating something new.

I understand that the canopies are not really a preservation project, or at least Mr. Lourie doesn't think so, the way that, say, the lighting redesign that comes later really was more of an effort to restore a 1960s design. Do you have any either other experiences with preservation or adaptation, or just any general comments about the differences between preservation and a contextual architecture?

Richard Chenoweth

When the Metro canopy project came along in, it was about February early March of 2001.

I had just won a painting prize and was headed to Paris. It's called the Gabriel Prize and it's for the study French classical architecture. At that time I also was interested in Thomas Jefferson's influence on the US Capitol which, if we turn and look backwards just a bit, is based on an ancient French prototype of a glass roof.

This building I'm referring to was the Paris grain market. It burned long ago, was rebuilt, and then was finally dismantled. It's now the location of the Bourse in Paris. Jefferson was obsessed with this grain market when he was the Minister to France, because of the dazzling light that came through the glass roof.

The Metro project was not historic preservation in our minds. It was making something that was directly related to Weese's original designs but was influenced by a couple of historical ideas, one being the glass roof of the grain market and the other being the form of a sail vault.

The very first thought I had about the Metro design—and luckily, I had the advent of a computer modeling program and by this time I kind of built up my skills in that area—my very first sketch and then model of the Metro competition was literally a sail vault that was made out of glass. I immediately started puzzling, how can we get this sail vault of glass on top of the metro opening?

The sail vault form is a beautiful geometric form that I first bumped into with the work of John Soane. John Soane's famous Breakfast Room ceiling is a sail vault—that's where I remember it from. Maybe this also relates back to the boat builder who built the steeple, being a sail form.

How do I make a sail vault made out of glass? And once I do that, how can, how can we hold that up over the Metro parapet wall? That's where I was coming from in the early part of the design competition.

I tell my students that this canopy is a completely original new thing. There's nothing quite like it. There certainly was nothing quite like it in 2001 around Washington or other Metro systems that I can name at the moment. But I do tell my students that my inspirations came from these historical sources.

I'm basically an architect, creator, sculptor. I'm trying to I'm trying to create something in my own mind. And I just have to say that all of a lot of these ideas and images were swirling in my

head at the same time when I did my first sketch for this. It just so happened to be this kind of a glass sail vault.

Other precedents that were historical that I thought about were the very obvious one, the Paris Metro, which was made of bronze by Guimard. Basically, a decorative Art Nouveau bronze frame covered with planks of glass. That was really a wonderful idea.

We also wanted to reflect one of the great features of Weese's underground - that is the concrete vaulting. Once the glass sail vault idea started to develop as a computer model—such as how is this thing structured geometrically?—it became evident very quickly that Weese's coffering system might give us some clues.

I went down to the Metro and put a tape measure on some of the vaults. I think they were all double squares, Jon and I decided that we would take our medium size canopy and make the glass bays reflect this proportion, that of a double square.

As I developed this concept in the computer we realized that I had to give it a real geometric structure, because it had to be it actually had to be fabricated. When it comes to architecture you can't build shadows and light. You actually have to bolt together stuff. You actually have to build stuff that supports weight.

The thing had to be very real. And therefore, all the geometry had to be figured out. Ultimately I came up with this system—in the computer modeling program—I came up with a system where there was a transverse circle, and there was a giant longitudinal circle. And if these two geometries intersect you get the geometric form of the torus, otherwise known as a donut. The two radiuses could be manipulated to get many sizes and proportions.

I'm kind of jumping from middle of the competition to that interesting phase of competition between phase one and phase two, where we were already a finalist and we were developing these things.

But in my mind that's how these historical ideas came together they came together in a very fluid way. I was obsessed with Jefferson's romantic imagination and what he referred to as the dazzling light, and trying to recreate that dazzling light in the wellways.

Maybe it refers to the whole Chesapeake region in a way—a billowing sail form. When you attribute all these other ideas to the geometric shape - the sail form, the light coming in, the sense of the coffering….

There was one other thing: How were we going to hold this thing up? Because you can't just take a glass skin and bolt it down to the parapet wall.

According to the stipulations for competition there had to be all sorts of clearances and overhangs of 15-degree rain-obviating overhangs to protect the well away equipment and so forth. I started propping our form up with struts. Again, I took this historical concept of Brancusi's Bird in Space. It's a sculptural, tapered form, beautiful—I think there's a bronze one that the East Wing. But it's a beautiful form. I started thinking well, maybe we can prop this thing up using a tapered struts that kind of look like *Bird in Space*.

There's another chapter to this thing, and this was something that I tell my students also, was that we had all these stipulations. I think there may have been thirteen major requirements for the competition. They went from the very banal (15 degree rain angle) to the idea this structure had to be an icon for Washington DC.

Now we've got the tapered struts. Now this thing has to be iconic. I believe the ideas came together with a certain synergy. So these are historical ideas that are not literal. They're not directly connected, but who doesn't think of Dulles Airport as a transportation icon in Washington? Even in Saarinen's own words, I think he called it a gull wing or a flying airport. The building was elegantly supported. I think the concept of flying is expressed at Dulles. It's a magnificent iconic flying sort of structure, whether it's a gull wing or it's a structure in tension, or what have you.

We were looking for that kind of dynamism, that kind of iconic quality for the canopy. That's a tiny little chapter of how this thing came to be, but we pushed it, and pulled it, and we leaned it out farther. And then we realized that the struts would have to have a geometric relationship to those big torus geometries that we had: the transverse circle moving around the surface of a giant longitudinal circle. So now the struts have to be part of that geometry, so all this stuff had to be figured out.

And eventually that led to this entire structure. You can you can look at it and say oh it's like a billowing sail—or it's like an 18th century grain market.

Zachary Schrag

Right. If I can jump in here what's interesting to me is, one of the accounts I have of this is Benjamin Forgey's column in the *Washington Post* at the time. He's very complimentary, and this is one of the reasons I want to bring this into the story. But, in his view he describes it more sort of starting with Weese and going out. He says that "elegantly restates and transforms Metro's primary architectural motif. The striking metamorphosis of a familiar form—of a heavy concrete vault that holds up tons of earth into a sail-like covering that shows us the sky—gives the new design the potential to become a fitting above ground symbol of Washington's most beautiful piece of infrastructure."

To read that, you'd think, oh you start with the vault and then you figure out how to transform it. And what I'm hearing from you is that no, the vault is there in your mind, but it comes in a little later after you've conceived of this sail. Is that right? The end result is there, but the chronology is different?

Richard Chenoweth

I love Ben Forgey's comment. I remember when he called me up. I'm sure he called Jon as well in Silver Spring. Jon and I had an office in Silver Spring.

When we did the competition, I was actually living in Boston that year, so the competition was all done via antique email, the bird chirping modem email. When phase two of the competition was finally delivered, I actually had to deliver the drawings I was doing from Paris, so it was yet another complexity. But I remember he called me up, and I was having this really nice conversation with him.

I love that statement, and I've always remembered that he referred to it as a beautiful transformation of Weese's vault.

I honestly started with Jefferson's grain market glass roof and the sail vault. The discovering of the geometry and relating it to Weese's vaulting actually came second.

How an idea takes form is a complex question.

[At this point Mr. Chenoweth's connection dropped. He then rejoined the call.]

Zachary Schrag

We were just talking about for Forgey, and your reaction to his column, and how he praised the design, but maybe didn't quite get the evolution correct.

Richard Chenoweth

I can't speak to what he was thinking about or what he inferred from seeing the design boards. In July 2001 Metro board chose us as the winner as did the *Washington Post* readers' poll also That's about the time of that column.

He took the gridded, glass, billowing sail type of idea—I suppose that he inferred, in his judgment, that it maybe started with the Weese coffering and then came upward. But that's not really how it happened. I started with an idea and then and then we quickly turned that supportive grid—the glass had to be supported by some sort of framework, and we were just inventing the geometry at this time.

It was a natural thing to make it be a reflection of the Weese Metro and that's when we went down and analyzed and discovered the lower concrete vaults are double squares.

And that what we could do is have our small ones, be a different proportion, our large ones be yet another proportion but take the medium ones and make it that double square as the "ideal."

Zachary Schrag

And you're talking about the size of the wellways?

Richard Chenoweth

I'm talking about each piece or frame of glass.

Zachary Schrag

Oh, each pane, okay.

Richard Chenoweth

Each framed steel opening where a window let's say. It turned out, we went through just months and months and months, and even more than that of working out the glass system for all of this, but I'm referring to each plank of the glass, each pane of glass as a window light, as a light, being a reflection of that coffering system.

Zachary Schrag

It's interesting to me how much this all recapitulates the events of 1967 and 68 where the coffers were relatively late addition to the Weese design, but they were clearly a selling point. I think it probably said something, maybe about the Commission of Fine Arts, that if you can just put something classical, something familiar on it, it will really appeal to the Commission, or maybe appeals to the traditional people of Washington. But I have to think that the clear connections to the vault—to Weese's coffered vault—has helped gain the canopies the popularity that they have. Would you agree without that there's a kind of traditionalism in the town?

Richard Chenoweth

Absolutely. In fact, just as you as you started to say that it occurred to me that the roofing systems of ancient Rome sometimes involved and coffered roofs or the Renaissance certainly.

Zachary Schrag

Well, and then the intermediate ones are things like Union Station where it's got that coffered. Again, people again reacted to Weese's original design saying, Oh yes, this is picking up on Daniel Burnham.

Richard Chenoweth

There you go, yeah.

These are these are classical ideas. And that's one of the magnificent things about architecture, and I've told my history students this, that there are formal ideas that can easily span time.

The form that it takes doesn't necessarily have a certain meaning. If the Roman bath had coffered ceiling, and Daniel Burnham's Union Station has a coffered ceiling, obviously the programs are different, but the forms are similar. Where the forms are an echo of each other or a reflection of each other so, yeah, I usually see these things as formal ideas that can easily be transmitted from time. They can be something completely new. It's an inspirational sort of historicism, rather than a literal or a formal historicism.

And, which is even removed, again, from direct literal things like preservation. That's the first stage of this sources and is, let's say I'm going to restore this building to look exactly the way it did in 1680. Then there's there are other types of historicism where you can kind of borrow an idea of something, you can borrow form of something, and reinvent it. And I think you can step away, one more time and say I'm going to let the inspiration of history help me with the genesis of this.

Zachary Schrag

I'm not sure I get the distinction between those last two, and where you would fit the canopies on that.

Richard Chenoweth

I would say that it's inspirational.

There's nothing directly historical about the canopies. But I was thinking of historical forms. I was thinking about the inspiration of the light streaming in the glass roof, the billowing sail vault. I was trying to zero in on something. And in the back of my mind I knew this whatever this was it was going to have to be iconic. It was going to be a striking new type of form. We immediately saw these things taking shape.

I think one thing that resonated with the Metro board and the Metro people and the Commission of Fine Arts, etc., was the iconic quality of this.

There were discussions very early on about putting signage on these things. Jon and I would go to these meetings and say you don't need signage! These canopies are the signage, this is the Metro!

At the Baths of Diocletian, there probably was not a big sign that said "Baths of Diocletian this way." People saw it and knew what it was.

So I definitely see it in the inspirational.

Zachary Schrag

I'm not trying to shoehorn the facts here, and one of the things I'm I've been working with and telling the story is not to tell this as a preservation story, but more as a story of how WMATA design resurged. This is all going on, frankly, at a fairly low point of design, not just architecture, but graphics. This is when right around the same time that the new rail cars are ordered, and they have no connection to previous architectural or mechanical design. And actually the general manager is saying we want stuff that looks new. I think the story here may not be so much that your design was important for preservation as much as just the idea that you needed something iconic. That these were not simply mechanical shelters designed to meet an ASME standard, but

that were going to be important works. This isn't just WMATA. It's also the Commission of Fine Arts. To some extent, National Capital Planning Commission and other agencies.

But I just wonder if you have any thoughts on the institutional background of this. Again, the first idea that WMTA had was we're going to take the Court House canopy, which is basically a suburban shopping mall shed ,and replicate that throughout downtown DC. They get a lot of criticism for that. And then it goes to the other extreme, which is the I' arguably the biggest architectural competition they've had Weese's selection in 1967.

So, any comments on the institutional significance of this competition or your experience of working with all of these agencies?

Richard Chenoweth

Let's see. That's a big, big topic.

The first times I started using the Washington DC Metro are in the late 70s early 80s. Even going all the way back to 1980, let's say, 79, 80, 81, it struck me how magnificent this place was this underground. I had been on a few other Metro systems, but I really loved the unified quality of DC's Metro. I love the vaulting, I love the lighting, I love the space.

Here's a here's an odd little sidebar, but a lot of those original metro station flooring systems are six by six or eight by eight a ceramic hexagonal tiles. The flooring right, you know what I'm talking about on the platform? That was Thomas Jefferson's favorite flooring tile. And it even exists in the US Capitol in a in a couple of stairwells that predate the fire.

So I was always infatuated by this,

It was kind of crazy. It was off the charts when we were selected as finalists and again we were it was off the charts when we were selected as the winners, we just couldn't—it's kind of hard to believe that you'll ever entered a competition like this and actually when its service, it was kind of mind blowing.

But our experience with—I think that must have resonated the idea that this is something new.

I was very discouraged by some of the earlier canopies that they had done up near, not far up. I can't remember.

Zachary Schrag

The Green Line ones got a lot of criticism, you're probably thinking.

Richard Chenoweth

There are a couple of Green Line ones that basically look like barrel vaults or sheds or something. And when I when I saw when I saw those I just got a little depressed. I think that looks like anything anywhere.

It could be that that ours had this certain unspoken resonance. J. Carter Brown was the chairman of the time of the CFA and the Metro people loved it.

But again it was important that it be iconic. We imagined these things at night being beacons that you can see from three blocks away, What could be more welcoming than to see from three blocks away like this dynamic glassy structure beautifully illuminated like a miniature Dulles Airport, and knowing that, Oh there's it is, there's the Metro, that's where we're headed. And then in the back of your mind, oh, that Metro will take us to Dulles. Or that Metro will—I'm not sure if it goes to Dulles?

Zachary Schrag

Next year!

Richard Chenoweth

Eventually.

Zachary Schrag

It's been a very long delay.

Richard Chenoweth

But Burnham's train station and other places.

So yeah how that resonates, how that resonated with the with the Metro folks.

I think I remember all those years and years of early meetings that you had with them in between 2001 and 2005. Just so many meetings down there. So many meetings with so many presentations, and no one ever really had a problem. Everybody was very enthusiastic about this design. It must have resonated in a way that it didn't offer something new. It was it was kind of a new structure, this billowing sail vault held up by the tapered struts.

There isn't anything quite like it. Tectonically or structurally, one of the criteria for the competition was then in touch down on the parapet wall, it that is attach in as few places as possible. Our first group of canopies, we have some that are touching down in more than five spots. But literally this this canopy will come down at five locations on the wall.

It was kind of a very good confluence of iconic nature, a new type of form, something that was very closely and directly related to the Metro, something that could be engineered nicely and could be—in the best case scenarios, our canopy steel was erected between midnight and six o'clock in the morning.

If it worked out right—and some of them did work out just beautifully. They would close down the Metro—no they didn't close down the Metro—they put these dance floors on top of the opening and all the steel would be erected in six hours or so.

Then it would take some time after that to get all the glass on and everything. All the lighting in.

Zachary Schrag

I was going to ask you, do you know if that was why they wanted as few connection points as possible? Because I know that's a big concern for a lot of Metro projects is, how can we install or rehab or whatever in that six hour window.

Richard Chenoweth

I think the engineers—yeah—they were thinking of ease of constructability, that was a key issue, a key word that we always heard. Modularity was a key word that we always heard. Kit of parts, that famous architect phrase. Every architect likes to say that phrase: the kit of parts.

Well, this really was a kit of parts. You have anchors that were installed. And the anchors were held by these gigantic bolts that were installed into the concrete inside the parapet. Those giant anchor plates would sit there for several weeks or so, while the steel was being fabricated. So when that steel came in and was laid down in the lay down area, literally all the parts were there. There was the lower frame which were all the tapered struts. They would go into those plates and be held with pins and then the upper cage would start to get assembled using the pins as well in giant segments that have been be bolted together. So yeah, it was it was easy of constructability, which was related to modularity, which was related to transportation and which was related to fabrication. The fewest number of connection points, the better. The best and simplest machine is the one with the fewest moving parts.

Zachary Schrag

My last set of questions really is about the adaptation to specific sites, because we've talked a lot about the prototype. Again, I'm just so interested in the recapitulation where Weese designed the Judiciary Square prototype and then he has to think oh, what if there's a center platform, what if we're going into rock? What if we are going outdoors? He has to take his prototype design and adapt it to all of these conditions, and I know that you had to do that with the shorter well ways, and the longer well ways and Huntington station and all the rest.

Do you have any particular favorite canopies? Any particular ones that were challenging? Or any other stories about the adaptation of this prototype to the specific station sites?

Richard Chenoweth

Well, there's one that's still being worked on right now Dupont Circle north. It's the same concept, but it's not trimmed off to be a sail vault. Effectively it's a glass dome. It's going to be trimmed off slightly differently. It's a really neat structure.

I love the way that they just kind of nest into a corner of the city. Like, let's say, Metro Center or there's one at the National Portrait Gallery. It's just kind of nested up against the wall. There were a couple of interesting times when Jon and I had to design a canopy and it was too close to the building. The parapet opening was at U Street was too close to the building. So we literally just took like a giant razor blade and just sliced off the canopy, so that it from the from the sidewalk it looks like one of the canopies. But if you if you walk around behind it you'll see that it's missing three feet of the overhang, because we had to adapt it to this urban condition.

I guess that's an interesting part about all that, is that things are adapted to the urban condition There's always an ideal in architecture and that ideal is always manipulated and deformed in some way by a condition. An urban condition or something like that, where something has to fit.

You mentioned Judiciary north, which is a very interesting one. There's probably a longer story, a bigger story behind that one than any. Because, when that parapet opening was there, the Police Memorial (NLEOM) was not there. Just getting the Police Memorial to wrap around Judiciary NORTH was an effort in itself. That's a whole story in itself.

A memorial is adapting itself to this Metro system. Then for the WMATA program we are now tasked with putting a canopy on top of that parapet.

It gets very complicated and there were jurisdictional conflicts that we encountered. There are still a few canopies to come, the ones that are on National Park Service land, for example. And it gets so squirrelly when you start thinking, well, Metro owns the wellway and the apron, but it's on the land owned by the National Park Service.

But I was glad that the US Commission of Fine Arts was always on our side. And they always promoted this project from the very beginning. They were always staunch proponents of it.

We never had any issues with them. They might have brought up some smaller issues here and there in some of our presentations, but for the most part they all pretty much, the CFA was just always they were always supportive of us, and always on board.

It's an interesting thing present to the CFA.

But when they like your design then it's really it's a fun time. It's a good room to be in at that time.

Zachary Schrag

I realize just for the record—sometimes the historian has to ask the layperson's question here. Could you tell me exactly what a sail vault is?

Richard Chenoweth

Well, imagine a billowing sail.

If you took if you took an orange. I don't have a sphere in front of me right now. Let's say I have a sphere here, and let's say I cut that orange in half, and I put half of the orange flat down on the desk. And then projecting straight downward if I sliced it off into a square the resulting geometry would be the exterior of a sail vault. It would be would be a section of a sphere, with its sides plumb—sliced off plumb. In other words, the sides would make these elegant arcing type shapes

If you go check out Sir John Soane’s Breakfast Room ceiling, you'll see his ceiling is a very shallow sail vault. I remember looking at that in grad school and thinking wow that is so cool.

I love that form.

Zachary Schrag

So the distinction between that and a dome, is that the plan is square or rectangular, rather than a circle for a dome?

Richard Chenoweth

Yes.

Let's say you took an orange and sliced it through the horizontal plane, right at the midpoint there, and looked straight down you see a circle. The projection of the sphere on a 2D surface is a circular projection .

Now, if you come back and you slice off the four verticals, you still have a spherical form on top, but your four sides are now plumb and vertical and the plan projection would be a square. Now hollow out the inside of that sail vault and you have this form that looks like the billowing sail of a clipper ship, for example, or the whatever that front sale on the big shops is called. Sometimes they're square in form and they billow straight out. What's that called, the jib, maybe.

Zachary Schrag

The jib is triangular, I think. I should know this as a historian, but I think jib sails are triangular. I think it's the main sails are the rectangular ones.

Richard Chenoweth

Anyway, I think Forgey got it right. I liked it when you read the quote and reminded me that oh, yeah, he called it a sail. Well that's great because it was intended. That is one of the ways that it started as the billowing sale.

So figuring out how to build that sail vault as a 25 ton steel structure—that gets into the design development part. That's where Jon I spent quite a while trying to figure that out, with Arup the engineer, the first engineer. Actually Arup was the first and the second engineer, and then it's gone through many manifestations. But yeah, we had to figure all that stuff out.

Many, many moving parts.

Zachary Schrag

Okay, well, I think those are my questions. Do you have things that you think I should have asked?

Richard Chenoweth

Let me take a look at your list here.

I don't have any further questions, but I do like this course of inquiry, where you're tying it more closely with the Weese Metro, and you're bringing up these interesting questions of the precedent, and the fact that it has its historical aspects, but in no way is our canopy related to preservation, per se—not preservation, but definitely inspired by historical forms. I think that's what Jon said also.

Zachary Schrag

He didn't say historic. He said he wouldn't use the word preservation.

And to me—again I get to put my own spin on this—I think what I want to say here is not that it's important to the preservation story because it's preservation. It's important to the preservation story because WMATA kicked up a hornet's nest by proposing those Court House canopies everywhere. And some of those hornets, then, I think, lead into some of the more directly preservational efforts, both in architecture and in in graphic design, which is another story.

Historians are multi disciplinary we get to make some of our own rules here, but just the fact that—

As you may have heard I' there's this big to do in 2017 when WMATA painted the vaults in Union Station.

Richard Chenoweth

I've heard about that.

Zachary Schrag

The agency that really put its foot down on that was a Commission of Fine Arts. So again, there are institutional connections here bout preservation, even if your project—I don't need to put a preservation label on your project to say this still matters to those people who care about preservation, who is the audience for this particular talk. So I think I can finesse this to not try to impose a label on your work that is not appropriate and still suggest its connections to more directly preservationist projects.

Richard Chenoweth

I do consider it a wholly new and original work, but the now that now that you got me thinking about this aspect of it, it really does kind of—

I've always heard that he (Weese) had no intention of covering those wellways.

Zachary Schrag

He definitely came down against it. I did find one slide where there's a rendering from I think 1968, showing what a canopy could look like I can send that to you.

Richard Chenoweth

Oh, well that's interesting.

I've been collecting historic Metro images as well. Did you ever stumble upon the full scale mockup of the car in the tunnel image?

I guess back in 67 they literally had a little full scale model of a chunk of one of the cars.

Zachary Schrag

Well, they had they had two-coffer—the coffers are eight foot four—so they had a 17 foot section.

So its was full height, but only 17 feet deep. So they built like a 17 foot front of a car.

Richard Chenoweth

Interesting

Here's another example of this, how do you add to a historic—

In a way, the competition was, how do we add to this historic building? Weese's Metro is more than a building. It's a whole infrastructure. How do you add to this historic infrastructure? Well, how would you add to a historic building?

Now, we design in our own time. If we have designed a Victorian Metro canopy or some historical literal historical sort of thing, of course, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere. But here's another example of one: the judiciary building designed by George Hadfield there in Judiciary Square. Beyer Blinder Belle built a beautiful glass box on the back of the courthouse.

That's another concept. That's another example of how do you take a historic building made of limestone from 1835 or thereabouts, 1840, and how do you improve the functionality of it? How do you improve the entrance to it? Now that the city has changed, how do we enter from the back, instead of the front? And how do we connect it to the Police Memorial?

I don't think historical architecture was meant necessarily to be held frozen in amber.

It has to know to in some way at some point. You have to add bathrooms to a historic house at some point, in some way. So these are interesting ideas to think about.

Zachary Schrag

Okay, well, I think those are my questions, and thank you for sending those images. May I use those in my presentation, or should I write to you separately for that permission?

Richard Chenoweth

Yeah, why don't you send me an email and that'll be fine.

Zachary Schrag

Okay well I'll stop the recording and I will send you a transcript when I've had a chance to edit it.

Richard Chenoweth

Thank you so much Zachary. This has been really fun.